

LAC battles funding cuts

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Ndanki Kahiurika in an interview with Toni Hancox

THE Legal Assistance Centre (LAC), which recently celebrated 25 years of existence, has phased out some of its projects and retrenched staff members due to depleting funds.

The non-governmental organisation had to shut down its Child Witness Protection Programme, retrenching some of the staff members in the process, Toni Hancox, Director of LAC told The Namibian.

The Child Witness Support Programme will now become the government's responsibility as the centre does not have enough funds to maintain it, Hancox said. In addition, the Advice Office in Keetmanshoop was closed down in 2009. The last regional legal education satellite offices were closed in 2005.

Hancox said they fear they will eventually close down the entire organisation should funds continue to deplete at the rapid pace as had happened recently.

"We wonder how long we can continue to provide services that are so vitally needed," Hancox said.

The centre's wellspring is composed of the European Union, United Nations and other governmental agencies who provide the centre's main funds. Hancox believes that donors have reduced their funding as a result of the World Bank's classification of Namibia as an upper middle-income country, back in 2011. "Insufficient funds will mean that we have to scale down the centre's important activities and narrow its focus on specific areas of intervention," she added.

The centre, which employs over 30 people, has been at the forefront in the fight for human rights, against gender violence and democracy since its set up in 1988. These includes the centre's five units namely Gender, Research and Advocacy Project, Land, Environment and Development Unit, Human Rights and Constitutional Unit with AIDS Law Unit in addition to the Namibia Law Report. Aside from this, the centre's other concern is personal resources. Hancox said that people are aware of the instability that comes with working for an NGO but the volatility of funding deters people from committing to their jobs.

"Stability is extremely important for the security and growth of a business," she said.

Hancox voiced her concern about the pace at which government, civil society and private sector are trying to bring change as they are reportedly not creating significant change at present.

In this light the centre's vital services are needed to fill in the gap by continuing implementation of projects that would lead to the development of the community.

"At this point the socio-economic status of Namibia encompasses persisting widespread poverty," said Hancox adding that the centre is not only for the benefit of the marginalised and poor communities but is for the benefit of all in society.